



**Prof Nokuthula Sibiyi** is Deputy Vice-Chancellor: Research, Innovation and Engagement at Mangosuthu University of Technology. She previously rose through the ranks at Durban University of Technology, from head of the Department of Nursing to Executive Dean: Faculty of Health Sciences, to DVC: Teaching and Learning. Prof Sibiyi was made a Fellow of the Academy of Nursing of South Africa in 2015, in recognition of her contribution to primary healthcare for mothers and children, and she won the award for South African Distinguished Woman Scientist in Humanities and Social Sciences in 2018. Her research area is primary health care with a specific focus on maternal and child health. She has published over 120 journal articles, conference proceedings, books, and book chapters, and has successfully supervised 60 Masters' and 31 PhD students.

# GALVANISING WOMEN'S EXECUTIVE LEADERSHIP

*Prof Nokuthula Sibiyi*

Exposure to HERS-SA has equipped me not only with the skills for leadership but also the desire and inspiration to become a leader in higher education.

Whilst head of the Department of Nursing at the Durban University of Technology (DUT), I attended HERS-SA Academy workshops in September 2011. Inspired by the robust discussions there on women in leadership, I attended a follow-up "mini" HERS-SA Academy in 2012. This Academy equipped me with leadership skills and sparked my desire and inspiration to aim for leadership positions in the higher education sector.

Since then, I recorded achievements for the DUT Department of Nursing, including successfully implementing a new undergraduate nursing programme in which pass rates progressively improved to over 90%. As head of department, I led implementation of an extended curriculum programme and postgraduate research workshops. Overall, the department achieved improved graduation rates and research outputs while 10 staff members successfully completed their master's degrees and three completed doctoral studies. Four staff members were promoted from lecturer to senior lecturer positions.

I was later appointed as Executive Dean of the Faculty of Health Sciences at DUT, my core business to provide direction to 10 academic departments with 3000 students spread across three faculties. During this time, I was awarded by the then Department of Science and Technology as the 2018 South African Distinguished Woman Scientist in Humanities and Social Sciences. I also received several research awards from DUT. Before my term as Executive Dean ended, I was appointed in 2020 as Deputy Vice-Chancellor: Teaching and Learning at DUT, just when the country entered the first "hard lockdown" due to the Covid-19 pandemic. My core business included providing strategic leadership, management and coordination of the academic activities of the university.

Guided by the skills I had acquired as a HERS-SA Fellow, I managed to develop teaching and learning plans that ensured that the academic project was not compromised, and that no student was left behind for the two consecutive years of the Covid-19 impact on education.

In 2021, I had the privilege of being selected as one of 30 women academics to participate in the first cohort of the Higher Education and Leadership Management (HELM) Women in Leadership (WiL) Programme 2020/2021. The HELM's WiL programme focuses on creating a pipeline and expanding the leadership pool, advancing and supporting women to lead change in a complex higher education context. It prepares women leaders and managers for a world of balancing paradoxical demands, engaging with pressing student and public voices, and synthesising global and local imperatives in sustainable ways. These are viewed as opportunities to shape an environment in which women can succeed and ultimately thrive. I successfully completed the programme in 2021.

In September 2022, I was appointed at the Mangosuthu University of Technology (MUT) as the Deputy Vice-Chancellor: Research, Innovation and Engagement. I am tasked to provide strategic leadership and direction in research, innovation, technology transfer, partnerships, international linkages, and engagement, including community engagement, in pursuance of the institution's vision and mission.

It is a long way from heading up a single academic department and pursuing a research interest in that field.

I extend my sincere appreciation to HERS-SA for galvanising my interest in executive leadership and management in higher education. I urge universities to support women to attend HERS-SA Academy initiatives so as to advance equity and empowerment of women in leadership in higher education.